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Bringing the Tana Delta Land Use Plan to action

Herdsmen at the Tana River Delta. PHOTO: COURTESY BIRDLIFE

By S. Munguti, J. Kiptum and G. Odera

The Tana River Delta (130,000 ha) is one of the most important wetlands in Africa. It lies on the Kenya coast between Malindi and Lamu. The delta is the second most important estuarine and deltaic ecosystem in Eastern Africa and a Key Biodiversity Area. Recognition of the delta as an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) and a designated Ramsar site further underscores the ecological importance of this ecosystem. (A Ramsar Site is a wetland site designated of international importance under the Ramsar Convention.)

The delta supports a number of endangered primate, marine turtle and plant species as well as rare fish, amphibians and reptiles. A vast number of migratory and resident waterbirds are dependent on seasonally flooded grasslands and Borassus palm savannah that covers some 70,000 ha in the heart of the Tana Delta. The delta's mangrove forests provide important spawning grounds and nurseries for fish and shellfish.

The delta is also a source of livelihood for communities, providing dry season grazing areas, fertile farmlands and rich fishing grounds. Despite its immense importance, the delta is threatened by resource use conflict between pastoralism, farming and conservation.

Nature Kenya in 2011 led a collaborative effort of various stakeholders in the development of a Tana River Delta Land Use Plan that was guided by a Strategic Environmental Assessment. The process was concluded in 2015. The land use plan has since been approved and adopted as a policy by the Lamu County government. In May 2016, the Tana River Delta Land Use Plan won the Royal Town Planning Institute's International Award for Planning Excellence.

The land use plan seeks to promote a balance in the use of the delta. It involves regulated access, wise use and improved rangeland management that will lead to improved sustainable livelihoods, security and equity, and biodiversity conservation. The success of the award-winning land use plan is dependent on its effective implementation. Implementation includes enhanced capacity of government, communities and the private sector to drive policy change, and to balance the rights, responsibilities and benefits of sustainable land management and conservation.

Nature Kenya has now moved to the implementation phase of the Tana Delta Land Use Plan. This is made possible with funding from the Darwin Initiative for a project called "Balancing water services for development and biodiversity in the Tana-Delta". The four-year project started in April 2017 and will end in March 2021. It promotes the Community Conservation Areas (CCAs) approach which is perhaps the most practicable way in which Kenya's vast natural resources can be conserved and a pathway out of poverty for the poorest of the population. This approach puts Kenya on course to deliver both key articles of the Convention on Biological Diversity and also many of the Sustainable Development Goals.

The project's overall objective is to support 45 villages and two County Governments to balance water use for development and biodiversity by establishing a community conservation area of over 95,200Ha at the Tana River Delta. The desired outcome is to demonstrate how communities and county governments can use natural resource governance to reduce conflict amongst communities and conserve biodiversity. Key activities for the project include an ecosystem services assessment for the CCA, livelihoods activities targeting 200 households within the CCA, and establishment of a community led governance structure for the CCA. Conservation areas within the CCA will be identified and management plans developed in consultation with all stakeholders. The project also seeks to explore sustainable financing options to generate carbon-credits and expand incipient ecotourism ventures to complement the Tana River and Lamu County Governments' revenues.

The project will directly benefit 35,000 and indirectly benefit 120,000 people dependent on the Tana Delta. In the long term it will benefit 1.12 million people, as the Government of Kenya plans to replicate the Land Use Plan process at Yala Swamp, Lake Naivasha, Lake Turkana, and the Nyando and Nzoia River Basins.

The project implementation partners include the Tana Delta Conservation Network (TDCN) and Tana Planning Advisory Committee (TPAC), who are local beneficiaries. These two partners act as grassroots agents for change towards sustainable land management; and also the 'voice of communities' for engaging and negotiating with the county governments, national government and other partners. Other local partners include Community Forest Associations (CFAs), Water Resource Use Associations (WRUAs) and Beach Management Units (BMUs).

The permanent glaciers of Mount Kenya have been diminishing due to the effects of climate change.

Site Support Groups inspire communities to tackle climate change

By F. Barasa

Climate change has many negative impacts on natural ecosystems, agriculture and food supplies, human health, forestry, water resources and availability, energy use, and transportation. Nearly all rural communities' livelihoods are directly linked to natural resources and are therefore vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. For example, prolonged dry spells have frequently resulted in food insecurity, displacement of communities and intercommunity conflicts.

In September 2012, at a workshop for Site Support Groups (SSGs), participants presented evidence of the impacts of climate change in different Kenyan Important Bird and Biodiversity Areas (IBAs). The negative impacts included: loss of most of Mount Kenya's permanent glacier, extreme weather conditions including frost being observed in some of the IBAs such as the Kinangop Grasslands, unpredictable or erratic rainfall, increased mean temperatures, prolonged drought and perennial flooding in some of these sites.

During that workshop it was noted that most rural communities' livelihoods were directly linked to natural resources and hence they were vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. As a way forward, each SSG was asked to identify the impacts of climate change on livelihoods, ecosystems, habitats and biodiversity within their area of operation, and hence assist to plan for the adaptation strategy that needs to be employed. The discussions on climate change also led to the development of a climate change strategy for SSGs in 2015. (SSGs are local conservation organizations working with Nature Kenya to conserve IBAs while helping neighbouring communities.)

Since the development of the climate change strategy, several SSGs have undertaken measures to counter the effects of climate change in some of the IBAs. These include reduction of deforestation, restoration of degraded habitats, reforestation and on-farm forestry. To date, over 6 million tree seedlings have been raised and planted by members of SSGs in various parts of the country to assist in protecting and restoring water catchment areas. In addition, over 300ha of papyrus have been planted to rehabilitate degraded areas around Lake Kanyaboli, Bunyala, Usenge and Bar Olengo areas of the Yala Swamp.

SSGs have been in the forefront in promoting the use of energy-saving cooking devices amongst communities as a means of reducing firewood and charcoal use. Through the SSGs, over 5,000 energy-saving 'jikos' and slightly over 1,000 'fireless cookers' have been installed at various sites in the country. The SSGs have also been encouraging the use of biogas as an alternative source of clean energy.

On livelihoods, the SSGs have adopted sustainable income generating activities such as bee keeping and butterfly farming. These activities are friendly to the environment and enable communities to earn a living sustainably. To date over 1,400 beehives have been supplied to communities through the SSGs, enabling communities to earn over eight million shillings annually from sale of honey and other hive products.

The climate change strategy for SSGs recognizes the need of establishing partnerships between SSGs, national and county governments and other stakeholders. As part of implementing their climate change strategies, some of the SSGs are working with their respective county governments and other stakeholders in implementation of their activities. Good collaboration with other stakeholders has been reported in Baringo, Kitui and Siaya counties, providing a good platform for the SSGs to achieve their climate change strategies.

Scientists in efforts to save frogs in Kenya

The National Museums of Kenya (NMK) and a US university are working together to develop technology that will help track amphibians with a view to protecting them. The project targets amphibian species (frogs, toads, newts and salamanders) listed by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as endangered.

Researchers have expressed concern over the rapid decline of frog population in Kenya and Africa in general, citing disease and destruction of natural habitats have been cited as major threats. The situation has been further compounded by lack of information on the species. Data from IUCN shows 1,800 species of amphibians across the world face extinction.

Human activity such as logging and agricultural expansion, climate change and alien species invasion have been blamed for the decline of frog population in Kenya. Poor waste management leading to pollution of water bodies, home to amphibians, has also been contributed to this population.

The first major goal of the project will be to collate information about amphibians in Kenya. This information will be built from existing records. A digital inventory will then be created and updated from time to time.

Using cutting-edge technology to detect the presence of species in the environment, researchers hope to come up with a better documentation method that will enhance the protection of amphibians that live in the soil, water and any other habitats.

A common reed frog

For updates go to
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Editorial Team
Norman Kiboi
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office@naturekenya.org www.naturekenya.org

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Not all Aloes are Healing!

By S. Allan

In Kenya, we have almost fifty species of Aloe, including three exceedingly poisonous species. Many people have heard of Aloe vera, the so-called wonder plant, and mistakenly call all aloes Aloe vera. This has caused not just misunderstandings but has had serious consequences. Applying the wrong Aloe on a wound or eating the wrong Aloe can have fatal consequences.

There are three poisonous Aloe species – Aloe ballyi, Aloe elata and Aloe ruspoliana. These species have leaf sap that gives off a strong ratty odour. Fortunately the first two species are relatively rare and not widespread but it is important to know your aloes before attempting to use them medicinally.

Following a presidential ban on the collection of wild-growing aloes, commercial harvesting of aloe sap has taken its place. There is the danger that due to lack of knowledge, this sap could actually be sourced from poisonous aloes.

Aloe kilifiensis

It's true that the leaves of several species of Aloe are used medicinally. And the roots of Aloe volkensii, for example, in combination with other plants, are a significant ingredient for many local brews. But beware! One of our missions in Succulenta East Africa is to raise public awareness that there are dangers out there and that not all aloes have medicinal properties!

Not all Aloes are Aloe Vera!

The plants called Aloe include many different species. Most of them have succulent, spiky leaves and colourful flowers. You can see several Aloes on the grounds of the National Museums of Kenya.
There is a very famous Aloe called Aloe vera. It does not grow wild in Kenya, but it is planted and used medicinally.
The Aloes that we see in the countryside and on safari are not Aloe vera. They belong to different species of Aloe. Sue Allan tells you more about them...

F. Ng'weno

Distant galaxies in November sky

By F. Ng'weno

In the south
Our sun and all the stars we see with the naked eye are part of the Milky Way galaxy. On clear dark evenings in November, we can see other, more distant galaxies. Find a viewing point where you can see low in the south, on a clear, moonless evening. High in the south, almost overhead, is the bright star Fomalhaut. Below Fomalhaut is an even brighter star, Achernar.

Below Achernar, low on the southern horizon, look for two pale areas like small round clouds. These are the Small and Large Magellanic Clouds. The two Magellanic Clouds are actually small galaxies, composed of millions of stars.

In the north
Turn around to find the bright white star Vega low in the northwest (to the right of the sunset). Higher in the north is the bright star Deneb, in the constellation Cygnus the flying swan. High above, four stars form the corners of a large square shape. This is the Great Square of Pegasus, the flying horse of the ancient Greeks.

Below Pegasus and east (right) of Deneb, is the constellation of Cassiopeia: Five bright stars forming a giant letter 'M'. Between the square of Pegasus and the M-shape of Cassiopeia, look for a blurred bright light. That bright, fuzzy spot is the Great Spiral Nebula M31, the Andromeda galaxy.

Planets, Nov 2017
The bright planets are low in the eastern sky at dawn: Brilliant Venus sinking towards the horizon; golden Jupiter rising from the sunrise. They seem to pass so close to each other on Nov 12 and 13. (Actually Venus is between the Earth and the sun, and Jupiter is much further away.) The waning crescent moon is near Jupiter on Nov 16, and near Venus on Nov 17.

Meanwhile, in the evening sky, tiny but bright Mercury rises above the sunset. Early in November it is near the reddish star Antares in the constellation of the Scorpion. Late in November Mercury rises towards Saturn that is setting; the two planets pass each other at month's end. The new crescent moon is near Mercury and Saturn on Nov 20.

Moon, Oct 2017
Nov 4: full moon. Nov 10: last quarter ("half" moon overhead at sunrise). Nov 18: new moon. Nov 26: first quarter ("half" moon overhead at sunset). Dec 3 – full moon, a "supermoon" slightly closer and larger than usual.

Kenya Museum Society and The Travelling Telescope

Exploring the Universe
@ Nairobi National Museum
Saturday 25th November 2017
6:00 - 10:00pm

Join Kenya Museum Society and The Travelling Telescope at Nairobi National Museum as we explore the night sky. We shall have a mobile planetarium, remote navigator and one of the largest telescope in Kenya. The focus for the 25th November will be the Moon. Event is open for kids aged 3 years and above as well as adults.

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in the FIELD

NOVEMBER AT A GLIMPSE

Nov 1st	Marning Bird Walk
Nov 4th	FaCP Nature Walk
Nov 8th	Marning Bird Walk
Nav 11th	FaNA Nature Walk
Nav 15th	Marning Bird Walk
Nov 18th	FoCP Nature Walk Morning Bird Walk
Nov 19th	Sunday Bird Watch
Nav 22nd	Morning Bird Walk
Nav 23rd	FaNA Film
Nov 29th	Marning Bird Walk

Bird ringing every Tuesday morning (check with Ornithology sectian, Natianal Museums).

Birders Please Note! Wednesday Morning Birdwalks meet at 8:30 am at the Nairobi National Museum. Members meet in the courtyard of the Museum, past the entrance to the galleries. We may walk in the museum grounds or visit a different site in Nairobi. The walks end at about 12:30 pm. Please note that we are unable to provide transport, although some members share.

The Sunday Birdwatch on the THIRD Sunday of each month also meets at 8:30 am, at the same location. It is a day trip; please bring water, lunch and transport if possible.

Mombasa Birdwalks On the 3rd Saturday of each month. For meeting time and place, please contact Taibali Hamzali <thamzali@gmail.com> / 0733-980540; or Doris Schaule <dorischaule@gmail.com> / 0722-277752. Or check Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/FFJmombasa/>

Contact the office for information on other birdwalks in Kakamega, Kisumu, and other sites

Ngong Forest walks · 1st and 3rd Saturday at 9.00 am. Contact Simon 0729-840715

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

The Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI) invites submission of abstracts for oral and poster presentation for the

KEFRI 5th Scientific Conference

to be held from 17 to 19 April, 2018 at the KEFRI Headquarters, Muguga.

Conference Objective:

Provide a platform for exchange of scientific knowledge relevant to forestry and allied natural resources.

Conference Theme:

"Contribution of Forestry Research to Sustainable Development"

For more details kindly contact:

The Organizing Committee, 5th KEFRI Scientific Conference

Email: conference2018@kefri.org

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